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Washington: The New China Experts

By JAMES RESTON

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The Administration is busy reassuring everybody these days that China is not likely to enter the Vietnamese war, but how do they know? And, who are the experts who sit in on the great decisions and calculate China's reaction?

When the Soviet Union was the main concern here it was easy to spot the Soviet scholars close to the President. Ten years before the United States recognized the Soviet Union — in Harding's Administration, of all times — the State Department trained a class of Kremlinologists, and from the Roosevelt Administration to the Johnson Administration either Charles E. Bohlen, George F. Kennan or Llewellyn Thompson was called on for advice.

No such experienced and distinguished diplomats are summoned to the White House now on China questions. Most of the "old China hands" of the Bohlen-Thompson generation — John Paton Davies, John Carter Vincent, Edmund Clubb, etc. — were shunted aside in the McCarthy raids on the State Department, and the new China hands are not invited to the critical White

House policy sessions.

Secretary of State Rusk is the sole Far Eastern expert in President Johnson's foreign policy inner circle. He served as Deputy Chief of Staff to Gen. Joseph Stilwell in the China-Burma-India theater during the last war, and was Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs from 1950 to 1952, but he never served in China and is not a student of that country as Bohlen and Thompson were students of the Soviet Union.

There is in this Government, however, a new generation of China experts, skilled in the languages of China, who follow political, economic and military developments in that country as best they can.

Edward Earl Rice, a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, heads a large mission in Hong Kong that monitors and analyzes all wireless and printed information available at that listening post. He is assisted by two other competent Foreign Service officers, Oscar Vance Armstrong, who speaks Mandarin, and John H. Holdridge, who is the principal political officer of the Hong Kong mission. There are Chinese experts in three separate sections of the

State Department: Allen S. Whiting and James Fulton Leonard, Jr., in intelligence and research; Harold W. Jacobson, David Dean, and Paul H. Kreisberg in the political section under Assistant Secretary William P. Bundy; Robert W. Barnett, his deputy; and Joseph A. Yager on the policy planning staff, who is the only one of these State Department officials who does not speak the language.

In the White House office of McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, there are two China experts, James Thompson, who is off in Asia, now with Vice President Humphrey, and Chester L. Cooper, a M.I.T. graduate and former Central Intelligence Officer, who helps Bundy with Vietnam. And of course, the C.I.A. has its own Chinese agents, whose identity is not widely advertised.

The Gap

The amount of information on China available to all these men is voluminous. It is sifted, summarized and analyzed and shipped every day to the officials concerned, some of whom read it.

Not somehow the people who

know the most about China in this Government are not in touch with the President personally and at least some of them certainly do not share his confidence that the war in Vietnam can be enlarged without bringing China into the struggle.

Silence Is Safest

Unfortunately, the new China hands, remembering the fate of the old China hands in the State Department, are still cautious about speaking out. They do not want to get caught between President Johnson and Senator Fulbright, and who can blame them?

Yet the fact remains that China, which everybody in the present debate agrees is now the main problem of American foreign policy, gets very little public analysis. A start was made at re-examining Washington's China policy at the end of 1963, when Assistant Secretary of State Roger Hillsman went to San Francisco and dared to suggest that Communism in China might be more than a passing fancy.

Shortly after this the 1964 election started, ending objective discussion of the question and the Vietnamese war has got in the way, even for President Johnson, ever since.